The Power of Somali Poetry

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Hargeisa, Somaliland

Author's Preface

This book was written to preserve, document, and explain the practical power of Somali poetry (suugaan) as a living social institution. Somali poetry is not merely artistic expression; it has historically functioned as law, diplomacy, moral guidance, and conflict resolution. Through poetry, wars were stopped, marriages negotiated, stolen property recovered, and personal and collective honor defended.

The purpose of this work is to present authentic historical examples that demonstrate how Somali poetry shaped everyday life. The book is intended for students, researchers, cultural historians, and the general public interested in Somali heritage. By documenting these oral traditions in written form, this work aims to contribute to the preservation of Somali intellectual and cultural history for future generations.

Introduction

Somali poetry (suugaanta) is more than artistic expression—it is a powerful tool that has shaped social life for centuries. In Somali society, poets (abwaans) mediated conflicts, preserved honor, negotiated marriages, and recovered stolen property using words instead of force.

This book presents a collection of historic poems and narratives that demonstrate the extraordinary role of Somali poetry in everyday life. From stopping wars between clans to securing a bride through eloquence and defending personal and social honor, these examples reveal the practical and cultural power of the spoken word.

Through the works of renowned poets such as Ibraahin Gadhle, Faarax Nuur, Salaan Carabey, Faarax Afcad, Cismaan Aadan Dibi, Cali Dhuux Aadan Gorayo, and Faarax Laanjeer, readers will discover how poetry serves as a mirror of society, a guide for ethics, and a source of wisdom.

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1. The Power of Poetry in Somali Society

1.1 Sharaxaadda Awoodda Maansada (Ibraahin Gadhle)

Waayadii hore, suugaantu waxay ahayd laf-dhabarta isgaarsiinta bulshada. Waxaa loo adeegsan jiray daminta colaadaha, wacyigelinta, guubaabinta, maaweelinta, hasaawaha, iyo kulamada farxadda leh. Suugaantu waxay ahayd habka ugu muhiimsan ee ay bulshadu isku kala warqaaddo uguna cabbirto dareenkeeda iyo aragtideeda.

To demonstrate the vast power of words, we examine a poem by the great master of eloquence, **Ibraahin Sulaymaan Siciid (Ibraahin Gadhle)**:

Maansooy nin kugu duul,
Nina maalin kugu dood,
Nina dhuuni kugu doon,
Nina darajo kaa dhigey.

(English translation follows in text)

Analysis

This poem presents poetry as a neutral instrument whose impact depends on the moral intention of the poet. It can heal or harm, unite or divide, defend truth or inflame conflict. The poem emphasizes that the greatest responsibility lies with the poet, whose ethical choices determine the outcome of their words.

To demonstrate the vast power of words and the influence of poetry on human life, we present a short poem that profoundly illustrates the role of poetry. This poem is among the works of the great master of eloquence, Ibraahin Sulaymaan Siciid, widely known as Ibraahin Gadhle. The poet states:

O Poetry, one may attack with you,
Another may debate with you,
Another may seek livelihood through you,
Another may rise to honor and rank by you.

Another may feel pain through you,
Another may heal wounds through you,
Another may awaken growth through you,
Another may extinguish raging fire through you.

Another may call for peace through you,
Another may ward off calamity through you,
O Poetry, prayer and blessing,
According to the one who unleashes you.

You ignite the fire of the soul,
Each person walks with you according to their path,
And channels their emotions through you.

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2. Poetry as a Tool for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

The Peace-Making Poem (Faarax Nuur)

Two closely related clans were on the verge of war, having gathered their weapons and warriors. Before disaster struck, a council of elders, including Faarax Nuur, a renowned poet, courageous leader, and respected figure, intervened. When initial negotiation attempts failed, Faarax Nuur recited his poem between the two groups. After he finished the poem, both sides accepted his words, and the battle came to a complete halt. This serves as clear evidence of the power of Somali poetry and the ability of words to bring peace.

Poetic Excerpt

“I am the most worthy, my merits stand tall and cannot be surpassed.

That very arrogance caused the catastrophe of yesterday.

The elites of Abdi and the leaders of Da’ud were destroyed,

Their great names and flourishing youth lost.

Even we have seen our strength and vigor diminished.

Small matters that could have been managed nearly caused ruin.

Disaster strikes only once—so stand apart from one another today.”

Faarax Nuur’s intervention demonstrates the extraordinary role of Somali poetry in society. His ability to stop a war through the power of words alone exemplifies how poetry is not only an art form but also a practical instrument for social cohesion, conflict resolution, and moral guidance

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3. Poetry, Love, and Marriage Negotiation

3.1 Gabaygii Lagu Helay Yaradkii La Diiday (Salaan Carabey)

Salaan Maxamed Xirsi (Carabey) used poetry to persuade a family that initially rejected his marriage proposal. Through eloquence, he resolved a family dispute and secured the bride.

Analysis

This case demonstrates poetry’s central role in love, persuasion, and social negotiation within Somali culture.

3.2 Tilmaanta Faraska iyo Milgaha Abwaanka (Faarax Afcad)

Faarax Afcad poetically described the horse he desired, resulting in him being granted a valuable replacement. This story highlights poetry as a practical tool for negotiation and material exchange.

3.3 Gabaygii Yaradka Lagu Helay (Cismaan Aadan Dibi)

Cismaan Aadan Dibi used poetry to convince a bride’s father to accept a complete dowry. His success demonstrates poetry’s effectiveness in resolving social obligations.

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4. Poetry, Honor, and Justice

4.1 Gabaygii Geela Lagu Soo Celiyey (Cali Dhuux Aadan Gorayo)

Instead of using force, Cali Dhuux Aadan Gorayo recited a poem to recover stolen camels. The livestock was returned the same night, proving poetry's authority as a form of justice.

4.2 Difaaca Nafta Gabayga (Faarax Laanjeer)

Faarax Laanjeer defended his reputation through poetry when accused of wrongdoing. His poem clarified cultural norms and protected his honor.

Conclusion

Somali poetry functioned as law, diplomacy, therapy, and social governance. These examples prove that words held the power to achieve what force could not. Poetry was the moral court, the negotiation table, and the voice of justice in Somali society.

Appendix A: Poets Featured in This Book

- Ibraahin Sulaymaan Siciid (Ibraahin Gadhle)
- Faarax Nuur
- Salaan Maxamed Xirsi (Carabey)
- Faarax Afcad
- Cismaan Aadan Dibi
- Cali Dhuux Aadan Gorayo

- Faarax Laanjeer

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